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## Farm computer program, retired area extension agent honored

John Sparks served in Floyd, Lawrence

### Allen Blair/The Independent

Frankfort — The Computers for Farmers program run statewide by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, including in Ashland, and retired extension agent John Sparks were honored Friday at the Governor's Summit on Agriculture.

Sparks, who served 32 years in UK's extension service in Floyd and Lawrence counties, was named a 2007 County Council Member of the Year.

After being an adviser to the Lawrence County Council for the last six years, 2006 was Sparks' first year as a member of the council and chairman.

Computers for Farmers, which began as a collaboration between KCTCS and the Commodity Growers Cooperative, received top honors for innovations in agriculture.

The program offers farmers computer training for managing farm records, inventory, market research, and other aspects of a farm business — and they get to keep the computers they train on for free.

It's a unique statewide program aimed at helping farmers rebound from years of tobacco price shortfalls. And it uses a curriculum designed specifically for farmers using farm-related examples and exercises.

In the Boyd County area, it's been very popular, said John McGlone, Ashland Community and Technical College spokesman.

Two sessions were at ACTC last year, and one earlier this year.

"We're beginning our second session of it in the next couple of weeks," he said.

Farmers learn they can use their computers to help their farms and their farm products, and really appreciate it, McGlone said.

As proof, there's a picture from a class in central Kentucky taken on the last night of such classes where a farmer set his computer in the back of his pickup truck, alongside a roll of barbed wire.

A computer is a tool just like anything else, as educators say.

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The next Computers for Farmers classes begin on Wednesday. All that's required is proof of participation in the federal tobacco buyout.

The awards at the Governor's Summit on Agriculture — 2007 Kentucky Agricultural Development Awards Luncheon: A Kentucky Proud Event — were in Louisville as agricultural leaders from throughout the commonwealth came together to begin the process of a strategic plan of action that will encompass all aspects of agriculture to move Kentucky forward, the state said.

Keith Rogers, executive director of the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy, presented awards to leaders in the agriculture community for their service to Kentucky's agricultural diversification effort.

"I congratulate the winners of each award that was presented today," Rogers said. "For those in agriculture, the opportunities are endless for those who are willing to take advantage of them. I hope each of these winners will help build on the success of Kentucky agriculture and help lead us into the future."

Other awards included:

• Outstanding Administrator of the Year — Linda Lake, Mercer County Conservation District

• Extension Agent of the Year — Steve Moore, Henry County

• 2007 County Council Member of the Year — In addition to Sparks, Larry Clay of Perry County and Harry Young of Marion County

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